

**Interruption of Service:** The company must notify you 24 hours before any planned interruption of service that would affect more than 10 customers or last more than 3 hours. These notifications may appear in the newspaper, on radio, on television, in bill stuffers, etc. If a service interruption would pose a danger to any member of your household, call the company for expedited reconnection. If your service was not working for an extended period ask your utility to rebate a reasonable portion of the minimum monthly charge.

**Claims:** Most utilities will not pay a claim for damages unless your losses were due to negligence by the utility. You can submit a claim directly to the utility. A lawyer can tell you if your claim should be pursued in court. The PUC cannot award damages.

The PUC does not discriminate in employment or in the provision of services because of race, creed, national origin, sex, political affiliation, religion, ancestry or disability. We will provide reasonable accommodation upon your request.

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# At Your Service



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## Guide To The Rights and Responsibilities Of Residential Utility Customers

The Maine Public Utilities Commission (PUC) regulates the utilities that provide electric, gas, telephone and water services. ***The PUC does not regulate sewer districts, cable tv or propane gas.*** You should contact your local municipality (town or country office) regarding complaints against sewer districts and cable television companies. If you have a complaint regarding propane gas (bottled gas) company, you should contact the Office of the Attorney General.

The PUC's job is to protect the rights of all ratepayers and to ensure that utilities provide adequate service at fair prices. This pamphlet explains your rights and responsibilities as a residential customer. Business customers are protected by different rules.

If you have a problem with your bill or service you must try to resolve it with the utility first. Please refer to our bulletin "*Do You Have*

a *Complaint*" for more information on how to deal with complaints.

**Application:** In order to get utility service you must apply. The utility company may have you fill out an application form and ask you some questions to establish your credit. You cannot be refused service because of race, nationality, gender., martial status or where you live.

The utility must tell you the cost of basic or minimum service and also the cost of those services you may choose to have. This is particularly important for telephone companies where many services are optional and cost extra every month. If you owe an unpaid bill for previous service in your name, you'll have to pay it or agree to a payment plan at the time you apply for service. The utility may also require a deposit.

**Deposits:** The Company may require a deposit equal to 2 bills if it believes you are a credit risk, but it must tell you in writing. You can get the deposit back with interest if you pay your bills on time for 12 months in a row. You can usually choose to pay the deposit in full or in Three installments. You also have the right to have another customer in good standing "guarantee" your bills up to the deposit amount, instead of paying a deposit.

**Payments:** Pay your bill promptly. If you pay after the "due date" on the bill, you may be charged a late fee.

You may pay your bill by cash, check or money order by mail or in person at a branch office or payment agency. If you pay by mail, your bill is considered paid on the day the company receives your payment. If you pay in person, your bill is considered paid on the day you pay it.

**Payment Plans:** If you can't pay your bill in full ask the utility for a payment plan. This

payment plan must consider your ability to pay and your previous payment history. Most plans require you to pay weekly or monthly installment payment plus future bills within 30 days of the postmark. If you break a payment plan, the utility can send you a 3-day disconnection notice. The notice will require you to pay your overdue amount in full in order to avoid having your service disconnected. Utilities may renegotiate a plan, if you have a good reason for wanting the plan changed.

Most electric and gas companies offer budget plans and other special payment plans to spread out winter bills over the summer to the following November 1.

**Low Income Help:** Low income customers may be able to get help paying their bills. Utilities will refer you to the right agency in your community.

Some electric utilities offer Special Assistance programs for eligible low income customers. Contact your local Fuel Assistance (HEAP) office for more information regarding these programs.

Telephone companies offer Lifeline Service to reduce the monthly bill and an Installation Subsidy for new hook-ups if you qualify for one or more of these programs; Food Stamps, Medicaid, AFDC, Supplemental Social Security, (SSI or fold check) or Fuel assistance (HEAP).

**Disconnection:** The utility may disconnect your service if you fail to pay a deposit or a bill, fail to keep a written payment plan, tamper with your meter, or somehow obtain service without paying for it.

The Company will usually give you a 14-day disconnection notice, but it may give you as little as 3 days notice in certain cases. Not notice will be given if the disconnection is because of a dangerous condition or the customer has stolen service.

Disconnection cannot happen on a Friday, a weekend, a legal holiday, or any day the office is closed.

During the winter you have special protections against disconnection of gas or electric service IF you agree to a long-term payment plan.

If you want your service disconnected, notify the company. The company may ask for up to 7 days advance notice and can bill you for service used during that time.

**Medical Emergencies** Even if you have an overdue bill, you have a right to service, if you or a member of your household is seriously ill. Ask your doctor to call the utility or call yourself if you can't get a doctor right away. The utility may require a letter from your doctor. The utility will not disconnect for up to 30 days, with renewal up to 90 days, but you will still have to pay the bill.

**Landlord/Tenant:** A utility cannot automatically disconnect tenants at the request of the landlord or if the landlord fails to pay a bill in the landlord's name. The utility must first give the tenants an opportunity to assume responsibility for future service. The utility cannot require tenants to pay the landlord's overdue bill.

**Reconnection:** Once you pay your overdue bill or agree to a payment plan, the Company must reconnect service during the next business day at the latest, The utility can charge a reconnection fee.